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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the development of a new type of combined bilingual and bicultural/multicultural program or curriculum based on recent research. Some issues concerning bilingual education are addressed, followed by a short review of the findings of ethnographers concerning cultural differences in the classroom. The applicability of the Whorf hypothesis to the field of language education is considered. Finally, observations done at Potter Thomas elementary school are incorporated to illustrate the need for and potential of the type of program proposed. (Author)

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Language, thought, and culture: Combining bilingual and bicultural/multicultural education

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This paper argues for the development of a new type of combined bilingual and bicultural/multicultural program or curriculum based on recent research. Some issues concerning bilingual education are addressed, followed by a short review of the findings of ethnographers concerning cultural differences in the classroom. The applicability of the Whorf hypothesis to the field of language education is considered. Finally, observations done at Potter Thomas elementary school are incorporated to illustrate the need for and potential of the type of program proposed.

Language barriers

Bilingual education has been a part of Western civilization since before the industrial revolution. It has been involved in many different political/cultural battles, and consequently has undergone many transformations. Currently, in the United States, a situation exists in which there is a tension between the group whose language is already the language of power and oppressed groups which have a strong desire to gain empowerment through recognition of their own language(s). Therefore, bilingual education has become a politicized and a highly emotional issue as the oppressed group struggles for more power and the group which already has power struggles to keep it.

This conflict becomes more apparent when one examines the differing goals of the three most common bilingual education models. The first type, transitional bilingual education, leads to language shift, cultural assimilation, and social incorporation. The second type, maintenance bilingual education, leads to language maintenance, strengthened cultural identity, and civil rights affirmation. The third type of bilingual education, enrichment, leads to language development, cultural pluralism, and social autonomy. In short, while the group struggling for power endorses the use of a

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maintenance or enrichment bilingual education, the group which already has power views transitional bilingual education as a rational solution to a language "problem." As a result, the largest proportion of bilingual education programs in the United Sates are transitional, because these programs receive the largest amount of funding from the government which is largely run by the people of power.

> Bilingual education involving nonprestigious, ethnically marked languages today tends not to be substantially controlled by the speech communities served thereby but, rather, to be controlled by ethnically different or by transethnified elites engaged in transitional/compensatory efforts rather than maintenance or enrichment efforts, (Fishman, 1982:5).

This is an ironic twist in the history of bilingual education since in the past it was the people of power who valued bilingual education and were educated in two languages, while the oppressed people remained monolingual:

> elitist formal education in particular has traditionally been bilingual since elites could most easily devote the time, effort, and resources required for an educational process in which the target language/variety and process language/variety were discontinuous and in which the latter was given little if any formal written recognition (Lewis, 1976 [cited in Fishman, 1982:2])

This type of thinking has been rediscovered in the Canadian French immersion program (Genesee, 1987) in which an English speaking community has come to realize the benefits of being bilingual. The people have decided that it is to the benefit of the entire community to be bilingual.

Cultural barriers

What should be apparent is that whenever two language groups come into contact, there is usually a simultaneous contact between two or more ethnicities. "A link between bilingual education and ethnicity is one of the most widespread assumptions concerning bilingual education" (Fishman, 1982:6). This type of bicultural or multicultural contact may also occur when people who speak the same language come into contact. [1]

In the recent past, many ethnographers have begun to apply their methods of research to the classroom situation in which people of different language backgrounds and different cultures come into direct contact with each other. Ethnography in education has been extremely useful as a means of investigating and describing the

different backgrounds which individuals bring to the classroom and presenting these differences as possible explanations for the performance of oppressed children in the public school system.

For example, Philips' (1972) ethnographic study of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon offered some interesting insights into how the norms for language use differ across two cultures. Although the Native American children learned English as a first language, teachers still described the children as having "problems" in the classroom. Teachers described their students as sullen, hostile, or lacking attention, and having "difficulty comprehending and participating in the structured verbal interaction between teacher and student" (Philips, 1972:167). Through careful analysis of her ethnographic data, Philips concluded that the Warm Springs Indians do not have any real linguistic or mental deficiencies; rather, the source of their "problems" stems directly from the teachers' misunderstanding of the Native American norms for interacting through speech in the classroom.

In an ethnographic study by Erickson and Mohatt (1982), the researchers observed, videotaped, and conducted interviews at a lower primary school on an Odawa Indian Reserve in Northern Ontario, Canada. Erickson and Mohatt entered the school to examine teaching styles of Native American and non-Native American teachers. They were particularly interested in how teacher authority was exercised over the students. What Erickson and Mohatt found was that differences did indeed exist between the teaching styles of the non-Native and Native American teachers of the Odawa community. They found that Native American teachers tended to address the class as a whole and did not often address individual students, while non-Native teachers addressed individual students more often and aimed directives at individuals. Other differences were apparent in

> the relative amounts of time spent by the teachers and children in main classroom activities, such as beginning the school day, recitation, small group instruction, individual seatwork and instruction, and leaving the room to go to recess. More subtle are such things as the overall pacing in each of these classrooms scenes and in the sequencing between scenes (143).

Erickson and Mohatt found that while both teachers taught the same material, they had different cultural approaches to teaching.

In another instance, teachers of the Kamehameha Early Education Project (K.E.E.P.) found that by incorporating features of "talk story" (a Hawaiian speech event) into the reading lessons, the children's reading abilities improved considerably

(Boggs, 1976; Au & Jordan, 1980). Erickson and Mohatt summarize the findings of the Odawa and K.E.E.P. studies, "by discovering the small differences in social relations which make a big difference in the interactional ways children engage the content of the school curriculum, anthropologists of education can make practical contributions to the improvement of minority children's school achievement" (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982:170). Therefore, there are differences other than language which exist in the classroom. These differences can often impede academic performance; however, when teachers gain a better understanding of the differences, their teaching improves and so does the performance of the students.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples in which the linguistic needs and the cultural needs are juxtaposed comes from the study done by Shirley Brice Heath on the Trackton and Roadville Communities (Heath, 1983). Heath found that the children from Trackton did not acquire the same skills as did the Roadville children in terms of "learning language, telling stories, making metaphors, and seeing patterns across items and events" (343). As a result, they did not perform at an academic level equal to that of the Roadville children. On the other hand, while the Roadville children "seem to have developed many of the cognitive and linguistic patterns equated with readiness for school...they seem not to move outward from these basics to the integrative types of skills necessary for sustained academic success" (343). Heath found that when the teachers brought the students' ways of "talking, knowing, and expressing knowledge" (1983:343) to the classroom, some Roadville and Trackton children did better academically.

The important thing to note here is that neither group was performing well academically. This is perhaps not as surprising for the Trackton children (who did not enter school with skills compatible with those necessary for school) as for the Roadville children (who seemed "ready" for school). Apparently there are factors other than the language factor which contribute to the good or poor performance of the children. If it were only lack of English skills which affected school performance, the Trackton and Roadville children should have had an equal level of performance, and this was not so. These results led Heath to come to three conclusions:

> *First,* patterns of language use in any community are in accord with and mutually reinforce other cultural patterns, such as space and time ordering, problem-solving techniques, group loyalties, and preferred patterns of recreation. In each of these communities, space and time usage and the role of the individual in the community condition the interactional rules for occasions of language use...

> *Second*, factors involved in preparing children for school-oriented mainstream success are deeper than differences informal structures of language, amount of parent-child interaction, and the like. The language socialization process in all its complexity is more powerful than such single-factor explanations in accounting for academic success.
>
> *Third*, the patterns of interactions between oral and written uses of language are varied and complex, and the traditional oral-literate dichotomy does not capture the ways other cultural patterns in each community affect the uses of oral and written language (344).

It is clear that while language is one barrier which must be overcome, there are other barriers which are equally important. Cultural differences, which can often be more difficult to uncover and perhaps more difficult to teach, also affect the academic performance of children.

Language, thought, and culture

The Whorf hypothesis, which was first introduced in 1956, attempts to make a connection between language and culture. Currently, the hypothesis has taken two forms: a strong form and a weak form. Proponents of the strong form believe that language directly influences thought and consequently the view of the world, whereas supporters of the weak hypothesis believe that language to some extent affects thought and the view of the world. Whorf writes:

> There are connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns...*there is a relation between a language and the culture of the society which uses it* [emphasis mine] (1956:159).

It is therefore important to preserve every language, regardless of how obscure the language may seem, because languages contain important cultural information which may prove important for human advancement. Although Whorf was never able to conduct more research on and finalize his theory, he certainly was working with the idea that language and culture somehow influence each other. It is better not to separate language and culture but better to view them in a sort of symbiotic relationship (see Figure 1).

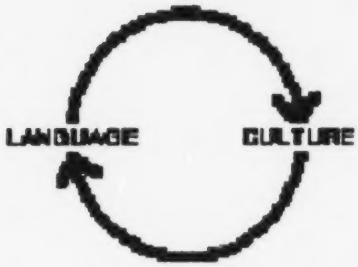

Figure 1

If it is true that language affects culture and possibly our view of the work, it is important that educators begin to tap into the valuable language resource which may exist in the classroom. Through language, teachers could help foster an understanding of other cultures while helping children understand different ways of viewing the world. Perhaps many would like to believe that this normally happens in a bilingual classroom; after all, there are few settings in which it would be more logical to teach language and culture together. Unfortunately, it is too often assumed that program which is bilingual, also has as its goal the teaching of two cultures, and this simply is not the case.

A good example of a program which does emphasize both language and culture is the Canadian French immersion program. As Genesee writes, "immersion students are expected to come to respect and appreciate French Canadians and their culture through their school experience" (1987:17). The Canadian English speaking community which Genesee writes about has come to understand and value (perhaps idealistically) the importance of another language and culture.

Critics believe that the Canadian French immersion program is not applicable to the situation in the United States. It is not the purpose of this paper to suggest that such a program would currently work in the U.S.A., but the rationale behind the French immersion program is a rationale which needs to be fostered in the U.S. As Carol Brunson Phillips states:

> My belief is that culture is not the problem nor that differences are, nor that diversity is a root cause of inequality. It is the response to these that is. Rather than *difference* itself, it is the response to difference that is the problem. Rather than *culture* itself, it is the attitudes about culture that are the problem. (1988:44).

If citizens of the United States could begin to realize the true benefits of knowing two or more languages and understanding two or more cultures, society could only benefit. Instead, programs in the United States insist on using transitional or maintenance

models, which may be effective at solving the language "problem," but often fall short of confronting the cultural "problems." These cultural differences have a great impact on the academic performance of oppressed children as Philips, Erickson and Mohatt, Au and Jordan, and Heath have explained.

Potter Thomas Elementary

One example of a bilingual education program which appears to be successfully addressing the language needs of the students is the program at Potter Thomas elementary school in North Philadelphia. Hornberger writes, "Potter Thomas' two-way maintenance program functions as an oasis of optimism in the midst of a neighborhood plagued by poverty, drug-trafficking, and crime" (1991:20). My first impressions were similar.

October 9, 1991

Today was my first visit to the Potter Thomas Elementary School in North Philadelphia. It was a sunny day but not even the sun could outshine the gloom I felt as I rode the subway and the bus through what is probably the most economically depressed area in the city. I could tell I was entering the Puerto Rican community by all the signs and billboards I saw written in Spanish as well as by the Puerto Rican flags waving in the wind. I saw run-down homes everywhere, graffiti everywhere (even on the run down homes), jalopies, and the streets and sidewalks sparkled with broken glass. I could not help but wonder what I had gotten myself into. As I neared the school, I noticed that there were no windows and no playground; only a building with graffiti on it and a big ugly fence surrounding it. I walked around the school once looking for the entrance, and finally gathered enough courage to approach a man sweeping the street to see if he knew where the entrance was. He told me where it was–I had walked right past it–I was looking for shiny glass doors like the ones on my school in the suburbs of Allentown, PA. "How different everything is from what I grew up with," I thought as I approached the huge steel doors which the school calls an entrance.

As I timidly entered the school I was overwhelmed with a much different feeling–the school was alive and people were friendly. Everyone–teachers, students, administrators–went about their business and almost everyone was speaking Spanish...

Since my first visit, I have grown to like my visits to the Potter Thomas School. In most of the classrooms I have observed, it appears as though the students are interested in listening to the teacher whether s/he speaks in Spanish or English, and it is apparent that the students are becoming bilingual.

October 21, 1991

I enter the classroom at 2:00 p.m. This is a 4th grade Spanish as a Second Language class which is mixed with seven African-American and seven Puerto Rican

students. The teacher's name is Ms. Rodriguez and she begins the lesson by pointing to words which she has written on a sheet of paper. The list includes words such as, "las ventanas," "la chimenea," "el techo," "la puerta," "el garaje." She speaks in Spanish and asks students to point to the items in the classroom as indicated by the word on the list. At times, she asks the students questions about things in the room and the student answer in Spanish.

For the next part of the lesson, the teacher writes the word "comida" on the chalkboard and asks the students in Spanish what they eat. Some students call out responses like "leche," or "cereal"–all responses are in Spanish. The teacher then takes out some flashcards with pictures of food on them. The teacher asks what type of food is pictured on the flashcard, the students respond in Spanish, and the teacher repeats the correct response:

Teacher: "¿Qué es esto?"
Student: "Es pan tostado."
Teacher: "Muy bien. Es pan tostado."

This type of teacher-student interaction continues for approximately 14 flashcards and at 2:20 p.m., the teacher begins to tape the flashcards to the board in preparation for the next lesson.

It is at this point that I realize that virtually all of the students are paying attention and most are very well behaved. Furthermore, most of them are participating.

This lesson is perhaps representative of what occurs in a second language classroom at Potter Thomas. The same type of behavior is demonstrated and the same type of material is covered by the "Anglo" students in the classes which are conducted in English and the same goes for the "Latino" students.[2] Overall, the students pay attention and it is apparent that Spanish and English are being learned.

Although most of the teachers at Potter Thomas are bilingual, there are still a few monolingual teachers which are "left over" from before the school became bilingual. On November 18, 1991, I observed the classroom of one such teacher.

It is 1:58 p.m. when I enter the room of Mr. Hawkes (who all the students call Mr. B) which is a first grade Anglo classroom with 29 students. The students are finishing up an art lesson with a prep teacher and some of the students are cleaning their desks, washing their hands, or talking to each other. The classroom is not arranged like the other classrooms, i.e., the desks are arranged in rows and all facing the front of the room like they would be in a traditional classroom. As the prep teacher leaves, Mr. Hawkes walks to the front of the room and says, "Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen at the sink,..." and continues standing at the front of the room waiting for the children to quiet down. He then says aloud to the classroom, "How could you help us please? and the students begin to sit down at their desks with their hands folded–they obviously have done this before. The teacher begins to thank individual students, "Thank you, Carlos," Thank you, Francis–while we're waiting for the others..." (instructs a student to pass out the 'boards' and the student does so). The teacher continues when he feels the class is ready. "Last Friday we were talking about emotions and feelings...I can't

hear Abner because other people are talking, what could you do to help?" he asks one of the students, and the student gets quiet. (2:05PM) The teacher continues, "Last Friday we were talking about emotions–Remember what some of the feelings were we talked about last Friday?–Who can tell me some of the emotions we talked about?–Carlos."

Carlos: (mutters something)
Teacher: I can't hear you. Bernadette.
Bernadette: Happy.
Teacher: Good (writes on the board) Francine.
Francine: Shy.
Teacher: Good.

This continues for quite a while and I begin to think about how this compares to my own childhood schooling. Next, my mind begins to make connections and I find myself comparing this classroom, headed by an Anglo male, with the other classrooms headed by Latinos/as. The differences in teaching styles strike me as similar to those pointed out by Erickson and Mohatt and other ethnographers...

After reflecting on this thought for a while, I decided that there truly were differences in the teaching styles of the Latino teachers and the Anglo teachers. I found from my observations that the Anglo teachers seemed to direct more questions or comments at individual students whereas the Latino teachers tended to address the group as a whole. The two Anglo teachers had their classrooms arranged in the traditional manner with rows of desks all facing forward while the Latino teachers I observed arranged the desks in groups of two or more. In addition, the Anglo teachers seemed to ask more questions in order to get students to behave or uttered phrases which indicated annoyance such as, "I'm waiting," or, "I don't like what I see." I did not find any evidence of these techniques for classroom management among the Latino teachers. They were more likely to approach the child, and without saying anything, fix the child in his/her seat or often just looked at students to show disapproval. Finally, although it may not be apparent from the vignettes included here, the Anglo classrooms seemed much more organized and the children more behaved than in the Latino classrooms which often seemed to have more student-student interaction while the teacher was talking.

Conclusion

These fieldnotes come from a limited number of observations in eight classrooms; therefore, no generalizable conclusions can be reached. However, the question of whether or not some important student needs are being overlooked must be raised. There appear to be distinct differences between the teaching styles of the

Anglo and Latino teachers which (if the findings of ethnographers such as Philips, Erickson and Mohatt, and others are heeded) could affect the academic performance of the children. Potter Thomas appears to be meeting the language needs of the children through the two-way maintenance program, i.e., the language barrier is being overcome; however, I am led to believe that the cultural barriers are not being overcome as successfully. It is too often assumed that a bilingual program is automatically bicultural/multicultural. This does not appear to be the case at Potter Thomas. The Anglo and Latino students are often separated throughout the day, providing little contact with members of the other culture, and there is little contact with teachers who are native speakers of English because most of the teachers are native speakers of Spanish.

It is not my intention to criticize the program as ineffective because it does not necessarily meet all the needs of the students–I know of no program that does. However, I would like to suggest that the program could be improved by addressing both the language and cultural barriers. Even if the language barrier is overcome, students still may struggle due to the different cultural experiences they bring to the classroom as they leave the protective linguistic and cultural environment of the bilingual school. Indeed, research is currently being done at the Middle Magnet School in North Philadelphia (a *transitional* bilingual school where many students go after Potter Thomas) which may lead to valuable insights as to how students adjust to the different environments of the schools. If this research yields results similar to previous research concerning cultural differences in the classroom and their effects on performance, then a program or curriculum should be developed which breaks down both linguistic and cultural barriers, thereby giving more oppressed children the chance for "success."

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[1] While ethnicity and culture are two very different terms, for the purpose of this paper the terms will be used interchangeably because, in general, the members of the language groups are of the same ethnicity and share much of the same culture.

[2] It should be noted here that the terms "Anglo" and "Latino" are the terms which the school uses to classify the students according to their mother tongue. Therefore, even African -Americans and Latinos/as who speak English as a first language are considered to be "Anglos."

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